

# WASHINGTON WAIFS OF 1906; WHAT BECAME OF THE ABANDONED BABES OF YESTERYEAR

Great Demand in Washington for Girl Babies for Adoption.

"A POLICEMAN, last night, while passing along K street, was attracted by the sound of an infant's cry, and found a white baby apparently about one month old, reposing in a basket upon the stone step of house No. 437 K street. The infant was well-dressed and warmly protected against the bitter weather. There were no marks upon the clothing whereby the child might be identified, but the police are making an investigation. The babe was turned over to the Board of Children's Guardians."

To the average newspaper reader, this notice published in a local paper meant exactly what it said and nothing more. It created little more interest than a notice a few days later to the effect that "The police of the Twenty-third street station were presented with an animated newspaper bundle last night, which, when opened, proved to be a lively, squirming, colored baby boy, not over a day old. The bundle was found by a laborer while passing through Willow Trees alley, and, having eleven dusky babies of his own, he promptly turned the prize package over to the police, who, in turn, handed it over to the Board of Children's Guardians."

What becomes of the 400 or 500 atoms of humanity that every year are turned over to the local authorities and become public charges? That the police are investigating" or the fact that the babe was "turned over to the Board of Children's Guardians" is a sufficient solution to a difficult problem in the eyes of the general public.

Many Illegitimate Babies.

It is a fact that a very large per cent of the abandoned babies is illegitimate, which, in the eyes of the world, is but another word for "degeneracy." But except in occasional cases, these children are not degenerates, and by care, kindness, and wise administration grow up to be useful citizens and to clean man and womanhood.

The shame and disgrace which forces the unmarried woman, for fear of exposure, to leave her baby upon a convenient doorstep is only one of a number of causes of child-abandonment. Poverty is very, very often the cause of a child's entrance into a foundling asylum. The father of a large family reads the editorial on the sins of race suicide rather gloomily, as he listens to the peevish cry of his newborn babe, and goes wearily to his poorly paid employment, wondering how he will make his hard-earned \$15 a week feed eight persons, when before it refused to purchase bare necessities for but seven. His sudden death leaves an invalid wife and six children without support, and the four smallest ones are turned over to the Board of Children's Guardians, for distribution among the different foundling asylums of the District. This is the first step in the right direction and the public is satisfied that, by some hook or crook these children will be cared for, after a fashion, but there is an undercurrent of feeling, that, probably they will in the course of events land in jail and again become public charges.

The years that intervene between the finding of the baby on the doorstep

Mrs. Theodore Shonts

(Continued from Second Page.)

Theodore Shonts, made their Washington debut at a charmingly appointed tea and small dance afterward, December 15. Mrs. Shonts suffered none by comparison. Her gown on that occasion was of black lace and velvet over white satin with the skirt and bodice heavily embroidered with diamonds of gold roses.

Mrs. Shonts' street gowns are also exceedingly handsome and original, one especially attractive one being almost entirely of brown pony skin. The skirt is of rich brown cloth, finished with bands of the pony, with a short coat, muff and hat of the pony skin, the hat trimmed with two graceful blue feathers.

Court Presentation Gown.

Of particular interest to feminine minds is Mrs. Shonts' court gown—the costume she wore when presented to King Edward, and which was voted the most beautiful and ingenious gown at old St. James.

It was a handsome Worth creation of white duchesse satin and net, made princess fashion over soft white chiffon and silk, handsomely embroidered in diamonds to give the effect of tiny little drops of water. The top of the bodice was embroidered with diamonds fashioned like roses, and gracefully finished with folds of tulle and chiffon. The heavy cord trim was attached to the shoulders and gracefully draped in folds, caught in at the waist with an exceptionally handsome diamond buckle. The train was also of heavy white satin and net embroidered with diamonds and crystals in the fashion of clusters of feathers, tied with bows-knots. With this the slippers worn were of the same material as the gown, embroidered in the same design on the toe and fastened with diamond buckles.

A more becoming or artistic costume would be hard to imagine. It created a furore among the feminine contingent of London society at the time of Mrs. Shonts' presentation.

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or in the vestibule and its majority, are busy, busy years and the following up of one of these waifs from almost its advent into the world until the time when it becomes self-supporting, includes an intensely interesting study of existing social conditions.

When the policeman finds the bundle of humanity on the doorstep of the K street house, he takes it to the station in which his beat is located. The desk-sergeant transcribes on the blotter the exact time, date, and location of the finding of the baby. Also its probable age and the sex and describes minutely each article of clothing worn, giving an accurate description of the basket. If the infant was wrapped in a newspaper, the name of paper is given, also the date. Board of Children's Guardians is notified and the baby, together with a copy of the record on the police blotter, is turned over to a board. Up to two years ago, the Board of Children's Guardians was empowered to select a nurse, asylum or hospital for the little stranger but, today the child is placed temporarily in the hands of a nurse, and later the case comes up before the Juvenile Court, which declares legally what disposition shall be made of the infant. When the infant is finally assigned to some one of the charitable institutions, according to its age or condition, the clothes and any and all marks whereby the child could later be identified are turned over with it. In most cases where the waif is a baby, it is remanded to the Foundling Asylum, which is located on Fifteenth street, between R and S streets. There the baby is again "docketed," numbered, and if its name is not known, one is bestowed, and ever afterward the baby is known officially by that name. And various and sundry and especially applicable are the names selected by the kindly matron. One of the youngsters at the Foundling Asylum today is staggering beneath the name of Theodore Alton Roosevelt Parker, because at the time of its admission, on election night, the fate of the successful candidate was yet undecided—as is the fate of the yet toddling waif.

Seven Years of Peace.

For seven years after the admission of the infant into the Foundling Asylum, it pursues the even tenor of its way. The child is fed and cared for, and attended to with as much energy and forethought, as if at the end of seven years it would come into the possession of money and position. It is taught, from the time it lies all day on its back, sucking a pudgy thumb, the law of obedience; a law of which the average child outside of an asylum knows very little. The discipline is perfect, and makes an indelible impression. At the end of the seven years, it is a question of who suffers the most at the departure of the child, the child itself, or the matron and nurses, who have been so closely associated with it.

But the time has come when the child must be schooled and taught a trade, and with this idea in view, it is taken to the Industrial School, a Washington institution, situated near Tenleytown, D. C. Upon admission here, with proper credentials from the Foundling Asylum, the Board of Guardians and the Juvenile Court, the child, perhaps a boy, begins life anew, amidst entirely new environments, scenes and employment.

Assigned to School.

First of all, he is assigned to school, which he must attend for half of each day, and where the necessary branches

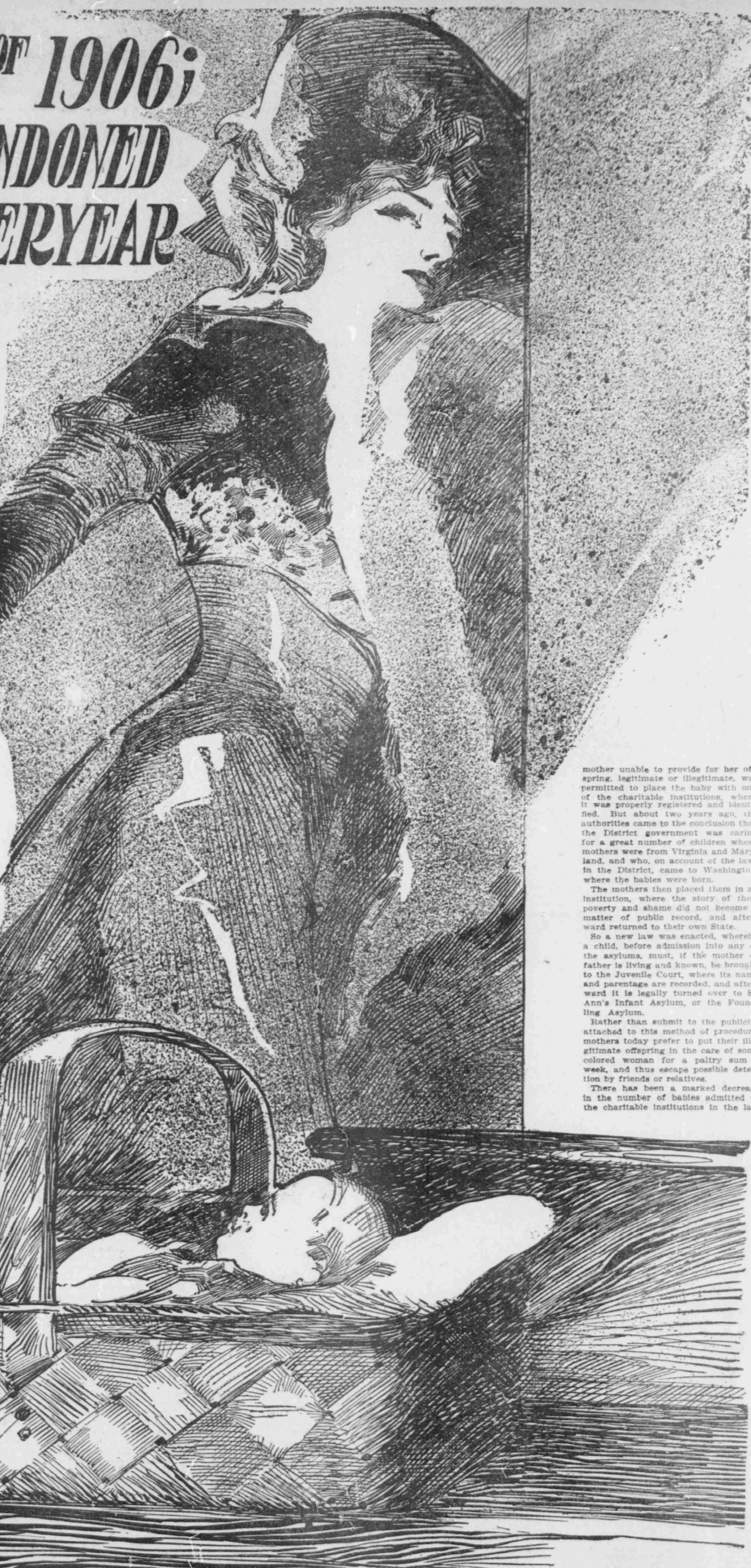
of learning are inculcated in him. The rest of the day is devoted to recreation, and an apprenticeship at some trade. For a period, generally extending about nine years, the boy is carefully and thoroughly perfected in the trade selected, and there are many branches to choose from. Horticulture is, perhaps, the one best liked by the boys, and considered by the superintendent and board as being the one best fitted to the peculiar needs of the Government charges. At the expiration of the nine years, or before, if the boy is competent, a place on a farm, where a good home is offered, is generally selected. Then, for the first time since

birth, the boy breathes the air of freedom, and just as long as he conducts himself properly, the Government has no jurisdiction over him. It is only in very rare cases that a boy has had to suffer the ignominy of the reform school.

Perhaps the boy has selected carpentry as a trade that will offer the most possibilities, so that at the end of the nine years he is placed with a family and allowed to demonstrate whether or not he can support himself. In other cases, where the boy has not been remarkably successful in any of the vocations offered to him at the Industrial Home, a place is found for

him as a street car conductor or driver of an express wagon. At all events, some kind of work is obtained, for a boy is never turned from the school until he is placed to the best advantage by the superintendent. If the child is found mentally deficient and with no hope of a bettering of its condition, it is placed in a home for feeble-minded children.

So much for the doorstep baby. The messenger boys, newsboys, and child



mother unable to provide for her offspring, legitimate or illegitimate, was permitted to place the baby with one of the charitable institutions, where it was properly registered and identified. But about two years ago, the authorities came to the conclusion that the District government was caring for a great number of children whose mothers were from Virginia and Maryland, and who, on account of the laws in the District, came to Washington, where the babies were born.

The mothers then placed them in an institution, where the story of their poverty and shame did not become a matter of public record, and afterward returned to their own State.

So a new law was enacted, whereby a child, before admission into any of the asylums, must, if the mother or father is living and known, be brought to the Juvenile Court, where its name and parentage are recorded, and afterward it is legally turned over to St. Ann's Infant Asylum, or the Foundling Asylum.

Rather than submit to the publicity attached to this method of procedure, mothers today prefer to put their illegitimate offspring in the care of some colored woman for a paltry sum a week, and thus escape possible detection by friends or relatives.

There has been a marked decrease in the number of babies admitted to the charitable institutions in the last

laborers in general do not fare nearly so well as the babe picked up in Willow Tree alley, and it is doubtful if they make as substantial citizens.

These girls are today supporting

themselves in stores, as telephone operators and dressmakers, and, fortunate, indeed, is the housewife who obtains one as a domestic or nurse. There is little question as to who will make the best wife and mother, the product of the Industrial School or the graduate in the person of the pert, young miss of the street corner.

There is in one of the large jewelry stores, in this city an \$1,800 head clerk, who twenty years ago was turned over

to the Industrial School, fatherless, motherless, homeless, and hungry. He is the most trusted employee of this large concern, a devoted husband and father, and a respected citizen. It has been a number of years since he left the institution, but his interest in it has never failed, and he is a generous contributor, at holiday and festival times, toward the pleasure of the present inmates. He is but one of a small army of one-time boys who have become a credit to themselves and the school.

A large number of the waifs, picked up by the police and settlement workers, are not sent directly to the Found-

ling Asylum, but, for various reasons, are "farmed out" to nurses. If the mother or father of the babe is known to be consumptive, or otherwise diseased, it is not deemed advisable to place that particular child where it could infect others. If the child improves sufficiently, it may in course of time reach one of the institutions, but if not it is placed in a hospital or sent, if possible, to a climate more suitable. It is a fact that today in Washington there is an unusually large demand for girl babies for adoption, as many as thirty-five being applied for in a single week.

Up to within the last two years, a

few years on account of this new law, and it is rather difficult to get at the number of infants abandoned, or released by the parents on account of poverty, each year. But in comparison with previous years it is pretty safe to say that the 1906 crop of infants or waifs numbered close to five hundred.

AN OBJECTION.

If we are good  
We may die early  
And miss the glad  
Some hurly burly  
Of life, with all  
Its fun and glitter.  
That's why we hate  
To be a quitter.